

ENCAUSTICS

Poems

STEVEN FRATTALI

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Email: thebanyanpress@gmail.com

Rains come down amid blue marks of stars
Tearing their way into the blinded eyes
Spread to the gray horizon where all hope is lost
And where the travelers must make their way

Heating their pork and beans above sterno,
A guttered cigarette stuff found, smoothed out
To a certain standard of fastidiousness,
One cannot be too careful, or too poor.

Too poor, or poor at all, was once my laugh,
The stock in trade of all my canned humor,
And then I realized there was no jest:

The powers that retained the real power
And kept at price of murder for themselves
Were absolutely serious. I was dumbstruck.

Throw all my writings in the toilet. Flush.
Yes there's no profit there. The glass of dreams
Was broken in my hands. My wrists were cut.
And cut quite badly. I could not survive.

Instead I walked out past the old gas house,
The ghosts of others following behind.
Where was I leading them, or they driving me?
Into the forest far from any word.

There we will sit around the fire we make
From an old fifty-five gallon drum --
You know the kind. A bunch of bums.

Poems passed around by firelight
Will be our private and unknown reward.
The wind will comment in the leafless trees.

Shower the prizes on the imbeciles,
Give to the covetous the coveted;
Bury me in the fallen shroud of snow,
Wasting no money on either cloth or priest.

Giving to Caesar everything that's his,
And that's a lot, watch the evening news.
I'll not be seen or heard from, empty
Attempt that faltered in the northern wind,

A scarecrow trying gamely to bestride its field.
What was my field? I could never know.
Bright coins of sunlight littering the pond

Drowned all my senses through my sucking eyes.
The drowning man does not know left from right
Nor up from down, and is not of this world.

Blow all my kisses through the pool's keyhole.
I will not join the party just right yet,
But I'll be there in spirit, floating, perhaps,
Face down. Lord all the absolutely pretty girls!

The pool is like a drain the clouds themselves
Will be sucked down into, white maelstrom
Of white sepulchers, the really airtight deals
Of ancient, sun-bright and once-fabled days.

The green leaves of the world eluded me.
I took a wrong turn. Looking in the roots,
Finding only oil-armored beetles,

Intricate and poisonous spiders,
And the pouring freezing rain whose nailing drops
Fixed me to the bottom of that leafy pile.

Bring both my balls together like an hourglass,
Bright grains running one into the other --
Make me my own time clock: oblige me now --
Insert the much-marked card of your smooth tongue,

Right between the globed retorts: your time
Is stamped as well, perhaps as much as mine.
Get on with it. The boss might soon arrive.
Not working is not eating it is said.

Not working is not living: my pastime soon.
O my gold-white virgin rapt in veils of cloud,
A dozen unicorns attending you,

Hacked Venus' own armpits glistening
In crystal streams beneath Hellenic sun,
Give me a blowjob before my day is done.

Green soldiers where all do you come from?
Your white trash spilling from the kitchen pails,
Your yard birds kicked around and kicked around,
And now you're one yourself. What do you think?

Not much, but even though the pay's not great --
Hey -- those benefits they can't be beat.
Five hundred doctors rush to salve your burns,
All third degree. Your blindness too is healed

Or maybe not exactly, but there's therapy,
Including psycho, and then lots of drugs:
Pills and injections, all of it for free:

The green leaves falling to the doctors' yards,
And to the contractors. But with your piece
Of brain, such as it is...well, what can we say?

August Fidel, your revolution still!
I believe it will come north at last,
The slop trough of the market will dry up
And all the small investors get real thin.

Lots of whoring then. Sharpened mujeres
Of the business age will look around
And look around some more, some on the street
And others floating high in penthouse Demerol.

Then all the slicked and blow-dried salesmen
Will think what they can do in a like way,
Fingering the foreskins they don't have --

Courtesy of Mom and American MDs.
Got to have at least nine inches though.
Oh well. Hope well-polished apples will work out.

Flower of women, you of black silk night
Draped with your mantilla lace of stars,
How you mimic all the traceries of dreams,
Vermouth and opium your rank injustice.

O my white flower of the neon streets,
Where has the rebus of the free market
Positioned you in, as it were, the larger scheme?
Luminous hemorrhage of night's artery,

Outside the blinds, lipstick, perfume washed down
Into the rain-soaked gutter of white sheets,
Where, beneath the tent-like playful dark,

Only your two cat's eyes are visible.
What are they saying as I fuck you blind?
That our two times are passing, slow, but fast?

The bush's burning hair is caught between
Two ink-blue alleyways where rain comes down
In megaphones of pinpricks: lilac light;
Frying the reptilian surface of the street.

You cannot live long within the cankered tree.
However high you climb, that shadow drags
A wet blanket weighing down your reach.
The fire between your legs will melt to ash,

Like the snowman: he just watered down.
No flame was sweating him, it must have been
Genetics; yes his father was the exact same way.

Florrie was telling me on the phone, you know
How she is; you can't shut her up, but then one day
Snow crystals, no matter what you do, will clarify.

Streets of gray houses, yellowing and drab,
And olive drab men patrolling up and down;
Assault rifles and grenades, plastic bullets
Possibly, and all this called ‘the troubles’;

A windscreen at a checkpoint where we’re stopped
Reflects in tinted glass the children’s game
That’s dyed into their khaki uniforms --
Puzzles locked with puzzles, water, clouds, fish.

The men are there indeed, slide forward off
The window’s convex bubble, parting
Like a theatre curtain pulled on both our sides.

The sun comes through much like a bullet hole
With shrapnel ingots scattered here and there.
Money and danger slide off one more time.

The green veins in the adder's tiled skin
Have an oiled sheen, a visceral fire.
Turning themselves around to find their tale,
Leaving the outside of themselves behind,

Unlike the woven carpets of the birds
That cannot change themselves so much,
They draw themselves to earth and to its hearth
That takes them down into its black retort,

Again and yet again; arrow headed lighting
Of the parted ground. The gorgon is not mistress
But is overwhelmed by you, her seaweed brains

Bickering among themselves and snapping
At the shadows of the sun. Yet serpents all
Have gun barrel eyes, defeating all the parasite
criminals.

A giant arbor woven of live birds,
This was what he dreamed -- their eyes like agates,
Their yellow feet like barbed and tangled wire
Or like barreled crabs grappling each other,

Their feathers aquamarine and turquoise,
Indigo, and sharp obsidian black,
Yet woven is not really the right word,
Intertangled, necks all corkscrewed around,

Speaking to each other, not jabbering,
But prophesying human absolute decay,
More-than-decadence, total destruction.

In my drug-inspired sober dreams,
And yet they were not dreams, this much I knew:
I knew that it was absolutely real.

The glass-dripped frozen and warm ice
Coats all the branches of the apple trees,
Even the crab-apples are ice-wet tough;
Hardly any weight on the limbs at all,

Despite the weight of ice and the low boughs
That almost touch circling the squirrel-tracked snow.
Bright and warming sun above, ice melting fast,
And soon the apples will be ice-pulp cold,

Like some Italian ice, but nobody will buy.
Way, way too cold: “freeze all my teeth,” as my
Grandmother used to say, before the home,

Its bedpans and urine catheters,
Morphine and Prozac, and anti-rheumatoid drugs,
As she died searching memory not there.

The skin upon his hands is loosening;
He is becoming an old man; surprising fate.
I didn't think that he would last forever,
But the suddenness, as it seems, dismays me.

His hair is turning gray, his skin is creased;
To think he used to be a handsome man –
Not his own idea, many others said;
I must admit that he was flattered and then some.

Counting the minutes, counting up the days,
Does age take time away or does it give? ---
The avenues, the streets, the alleyways,

Unlit pathways, the unguessed stopping points,
Though none of them stayed in for very long,
May offer their curious unknown vantages.

Yellow straw is windy in the fields.
The faces of lost friends are hiding there,
Showing themselves in flickers like brief flames,
And at the far horizon there is smoke.

Kill me or do not kill me, for I am dead,
A revenant who walks the burnt-out world
That promised stacks of golden wheat as high
As any house and apples in the autumn suns.

None of it could come to pass; it was not
That it didn't, but it never could have done.
This was the crow's flight that I didn't see.

The grass was thick and tangled in my path
With opalescent dew; and yet I didn't see
The green tripwire and the flowered snares.

My one-time mother, maybe 25, playing
Statues with us on the cottage yard:
She'd swing us around then gently let us go.
We'd stumble or pretend to but not fall,

And whatever shape we happened to set in
That was the one we had to stay set in;
We were the statues and she had to guess
What kind of statues we both were. Quite hard,

And all the usual monsters -- it was fall,

And Halloween approaching and all that.
But mother was remarkably astute;
She recognized us even through our shapes.

Mother gathered pinecones in the fall,
Perhaps an odd thing to be doing, but
She had a method to her madness: she made wreathes.
Making a wire frame for the whole thing,

With painstaking and time-consuming work
She fashioned out a wreath of dun pinecones
And then spray-painted it with gold or with some
Spangly-edged white of yuletide frost.

It was amazing, the enjoyment she got from it.
But it wasn't her alone. All of us,
Even if we left the making of these things to her,

Helped her outdoors on weekends; we made
An outing, with bags of sweet apples, crackers,
cheese,
Scouting the ground for the prettiest fallen cones.

One time I caught a school of silver bass.
They are not difficult to catch -- the dumbest fish,
But still I was quite proud: an outdoor klutz,
I was quite pleased with my whole catch.

Some of them were in the water still
And some of them were in my galvanized pale.
They did not act like regular caught fish,
Logey, half-dead already, they barely stirred.

Even the ones still in the water hovered
Near the surface, moving super slow
And like the slightly dipping wings of planes.

They are not good to eat. They were dying.
Catching them was useless, wasteful, stupid.
Mother looked at them, at me, and sadly smiled.

Into the water's buoyancy and small gentle waves.
I became part of them and they part of me.
Mother looked on watching, saying nothing.
And then, after what seemed a quite long time,

I actually floated on my back without floundering.
The day was brilliant, the sky so deep and blue,
And then a strange thing happened, looking up

I asked her what the highest number
You could count to was. She said it just went on and on. I
couldn't understand.
It gave me a strange feeling; and I was silent for quite a
while.

One Easter time my mother had used color eggs,
Pink and blue and purple, yellow and bright orange --
For resurrection of the body and resurrection of all souls.
And then there was pure white; for that there was no dye --

For white -- most of the eggs were that color anyway.
What is the color of purity? They say that it is white,
But I think it is a mother's love. Purity is that color;
It can be no other. My mother, as she dipped the eggs,

Into the dye, took on the strangest, an unaccustomed mood.
She was no dour woman, far from it, she could be stern,
But only now and then (I think already I told you about that
one,

The only one that I remember really). But just right then,
She started telling jokes. This was something different.
We laughed and laughed, dying eggs for Easter, symbolic
of the Resurrection.

On Saturdays my mother would make stew,
Beef stew with carrots, peas, and tiny onions --
Diced, and tender beef, potatoes so soaked
In meat sauce gravy they almost tasted

Like beef chunks themselves, a scent
That was an aroma, the whole house filled with it,
Sharp, warm, welcoming, and pepper-spiced,
With onions sliced, translucent and acid-sweet.

There was an entire world in this one pot,
The garden grew its produce just for it,
And all the bread the bakers of the town

Could bake couldn't soak up the flavors of the
broth.

This really was the world. The windows steamed,
And Ma had to use two hands to stir her pot.

Old age is like a curdling of the self,
A deep contraction of the viscera,
A rank cheese curd that smells,
Squeaking its comments and complaints,

There is such small mind left, less memory,
And no capacity to grasp another's plight,
Not even plight, just dog turd-size problems
Overwhelm the self's empathic light.

What is the point of living to old age?
It maybe true that some can make it work,
Remain productive, most of all spirited,

But these are rare exceptions; the most
End up in rank and urined, arthritic beds,
Or floating in alzheimer's mescaline.

The rain is on the windowpane so hard,
Its hammering sounds like loose rocks
Raining on a stretched-tight paper bag; the melting
snow
Has shrunk to islands, and the grass is yellowed
green.

Not really yellow green, but streaks and constellations

Here and there, it's hard and yet important
For me to get this right; just like the wind
Is blowing, yet not heavy on the pane,

It doesn't rattle it, but every now and then
The glass vibrates. Tokens of raw power,
And the world is full of them, small samples

Of the overwhelming earth and what it might
Do if the forces congregated just the way
They need to: everything and everyone might be
destroyed.

At some point when quite young I realized
That everyone despised me. I was not bad;
The opposite in fact. I did just
Exactly what I was told to do, always.

Yet still they hated me because they knew
That I was more intelligent than they,
To put it tactfully. This was the thing
That really really got to them in spades.

The dumb fucks are a cinch to get along;
They do what they are told. They don't know why.
They do it anyway. They are the world.

But every so often someone comes along
Who doesn't see the point, not that they can't,
But they don't see the point of what's the point.

My mother's face is like a marigold --
Red hair just slightly orange, and very round.
A two-dimpled smile and an under lip
That goes from thoughtful happy to just thoughtful.

Marigolds of all flowers are compact,
Vivid yet hidden in themselves,
Low to the ground as though not to be seen,
And yet they're always seen because they're
orange.

What is a color? Is it something that the world
Is opening within our gaze? Or is it something
That our gaze fills out into the emptiness of space?

Or is it something half between the two?
A melding of the human eye and space, learning,
fusion,
And, as all painters would say, a type of love.

The cave born artist brings forth memory,
Carrying the lion pelt of night
Into the copper vessels of the moon;
The half moon sails from its green canvas tent

That burns up like an anchor in brown salts,
Softening bones of sailors in the dream-stretched
arc
Where starry hulls are filled with gold mainsails
By all four of the corner-judging winds.

The hydras of stilled seven seas burn oily black,
And fireballs of tankers mushroom the sea's
Dark forest floor; above, the spinning globes

Of telepathic stars see with empty ears
And hear with blinded eyes, melting each gold coin
To seal up the cross-boned infants' mind.

The calyx of the lilies' holy scent
If filled with flashing water, and the sky is blue
With green reflections of the newest grass;
The light of two moons holds the silent sun.

The stars are stilled within the burnt-out bones
The zodiac has sequestered in its fire
Where the taxidermied influence of light
Has stricken every set and every stage.

A dry and emptied wave cannot bring forth
The salt shells of the old night's tides;
The tines of the god's forks cannot bear it.

The tines of all the forks squeak empty plates,
And all the unburned locks open the sea
To fill all heavens with no flood or air.

The burnt up streets are filled with bones of dogs or men,
Blue grease is smeared along the gutters, and the fires
smoke:

Walking of no walking, sight of no sight, hearing only
What should not be heard. Blood and drowning

In the bloody pond with floating body parts. It is not good
to see.

A head was javelined on a twisted street sign; it seemed to sing:

It's mouth was opened in an oval shape, but no sound of course.

Blood was streaked deep red blue along its torn shirt.

A truck was overturned near the donut shop, the shop's glass smashed:

People were hungry after all. There was a giant flower,
A sunflower running with antic root-gate down the street.

Squeak squeak squeak it seemed to say or squeal,

It was an oddly loquacious sunflower. It was

Running after me; I ran; it ran. And then I woke, yet it was
not a dream.

Leave off my memories of past times past.
I cannot bear the thought of them -- the girls
Who tortured every inch of me and blew
The moon-dark candle of the window's kiss.

My strength might heal eventually or not.
Conrad at my age had a sort of breakdown,
Took to his bed and staring at the wall,
Speaking to no one but his characters.

I am not famous nor was meant to be.
Anti-depressants, Xanax...how I'd love
Some opium or even plain old grass.

Unfortunately, my drug connections
Are as non-existent as my publishing.
How much Ambien would it take to kill?

When the yellow corn seeds of the floating moon
Came falling down like green rain on the lake,
And waves of corn silk cresting current white
Broke through the night sky's checkered dress of
stars,

I knew that one thing couldn't last that long; the
film
I saw at the old smelly theatre back when; I knew
It couldn't last. Black grapes handed to me by a
servant
All in yellow djeleba told me the single thing.

Like Elmore James, I know my time ain't long.
It is a simple though not a painless change.
It can't be made the latter, since the mirror's hand

Must reach out for you, fingering your shirt,
A pointless gesture or a sinister one.
Perhaps it hardly makes a difference which.

Inhabitants, the humans, pass in and out through doors,
Sometimes alone and sometimes in small groups,
Or sometimes larger ones; the humans wear pieced,
Woven coverings -- clothes they refer to them --

Except at times when they appear to wash
themselves
And then at other times, whose purposes we have
not
Ascertained. There is a strange liability about these
creatures.

Often social, cooperative, they nonetheless
Are subject to violent episodes. It is something
That remains to be explained, though its
implications seem grave.

If one street lightning miracling the rain
Would make the folded sky a torn cloth,
The sand grain marks that spider web the sun
Would follow down the stormed foot-printed lake.

The dove of peace will bring three sticks of war
And one will be the omened willow branch
Stripping its tea leaves from the thick green vein
To pair its swollen arteries for blood.

America, the benefactor's land
Where shit is pushed out before the seat can fall,
How many nights will you come count the stars,

Before the sunny side of Dow will crack?
Beyond the pine green hills where hunting licenses
Flap the plaid jackets of the hay-made men.

The candles multiplied a thousand times
Light up the luminous boxwood rounded tent
And draw the owls and the sucking mouths
Of every insect in the circled stand.

But there's a reason for the many lights.
Prayers of the oak wood and the Christian one.
The nearly untouched land is still holy,
Even though bulldozed down the road a piece.

Money of the banks and for the bankers --
Ever notice how polite they are?
Even when they know by looking at you

That you don't have a dime. I am the tallest
gentleman, he said,
In my gray suit and in my shiny shoes
And sleep inside the four winds of the world.

The burning road crowded with bomb craters
And blue rainbow gasoline flooded in the holes
That marked the sides and center of the road --
Zig-zag patterns. Where were we in our dream?

The man with one eye ripped and hanging down,
With blood both flowing and coagulated black,
Asked us for water. We didn't know his language
But somehow we knew what he was asking us.

Three severed limbs were lying in the road.
But they, we new, were from different bodies:
One was from a child, a small leg, almost like a
doll's,

The other two were men, but one was stout
And covered with quarts and quarts of blood.
The other one was just a severed head.

Light upon light together with darkness
Collecting shadows that must group themselves
Around a central core of showered life,
Falling around you like a flowing stream,

Except that it is not one but the open day
Bearing its gift of happiness to some,
Bearing its burden of misery to others,
(They always say what different lives men have.)

And so the day is open, is the day,
And anything can happen in a day --
Even a day can happen in a day.

But some things are forbidden, such as night,
And some things are enjoined, though we can't say.
Some things are imperative, impossible to say.

This rose of roses, a light of deepest dye,
Daily we put you in a glass of water,
For it is only this way that we hold your life
And keep it near us, pointing us the way.

Dante in paradise beheld the Rose,
But even his transcendent power of mind
Could not do just to the thing he saw,
For he had seen a miracle, given

To few and fewer mortals of the earth:
A light of roses and a rose of light,
Its petal angels rising to the heights

Where mortal vision cannot penetrate,
Where mortal thought is lost in radiance
And where the mind is stricken beyond light.

Beauty of roses, more than beautiful,
Opening anemones of red or white --
And yet your center can't be found;
Petal on petal, nothingness is there,

Except a whirlpool around a crown of gold,
A small crown, since your kingdom is so small --
Kingdom of beauty, smallest that there is,
Or else it is the largest in the world.

Though yet that seems unlikely, ugliness
And cruelty break their swords upon the night;
It's difficult to say which one's the worst.

And yet the rose, its silky soft curved petals --
Delicate, defenseless -- has remained so long.
Such things have triumphed, will continue to.

The yellow scotch pours from the drunken moon.
It smiles and then in staggers in the sky,
A man with just a head, black tuxedo made of stars,
Two oak root hands that reach into the sea

And blood like hemorrhages of Jupiter you see
On maps of boys' rooms when they think
That they'll be scientists instead of truck drivers,

Or possibly much worse, though I don't know
If you can get much very worse than that.
The traffic's violence soaks blood without cease.

The curved belly of the black guitar is like
The belly of the plum, amber colored pit
Opens to the yellow lilies of the spring's bleu white
Filling the dark cave with firelit memory

Music is a fire of the blood; my time is coming
But the crossed oak trees will flood the water
Of my empty name far down among the small
Purse strings of my mirrored counterparts.

The lunar flask is burning high above,
Pouring its absinthe stars into the drunken night.
The streets are lacquered with my vomit's blood,

As the lemon slices of the other's eyes
Spit out sharp acid toward my impassive face;
I will not drink black ink no matter what they do.

Round breasts of women and their skin so soft,
Black silken perfume flowing from their dresses,
Slim white melting candles in their panties
Warming their two legs like drift wood branches

Gathered from a beach, blue green of copper
Flickering the room and soft red lights
That do not mean what others think they do:
You are the virgin of the fireplace,

Holy of holies, yet without your clothes.
Radiantly naked you are even more precious.
This is your real self; the webbing of the streets

No longer holds you in its dusty threads,
Full of amber sucked dry moths, the dead
That still can shiver, all just barely, in the wind.

Beautiful black trees moving in the wind,
Staggering their topmost crowns like deep seaweed
Or like a deadly drunken man whose hair
Is fingered and then tousled by the wind.

They say the lord protects both drunks and fools.
The rain like pumpkin seeds as thick and heavy
And so icy cold; I have to get out of it
Or else I'm going to die. Blue loss of blood.

Gold coins are just beyond the corner
And brown barley bread; vegetable soup
With beans and carrots and white grains of rice.

My soul was white once. And yet should a man
Wander the streets at night, nowhere to go,
Nothing to eat, and not a glass of water for his
thirst?

Green fire in the frozen apple trees
Floods the hoarfrost grass with white deer eyes
That widen deeply through star-clouded nights
And slowly turn to green and then to brown.

The heart the beats inside the pockmarked earth
Is torn up by their hooves; farmers kill them,
Preferring the white shield of the winter moon.
And I have seen their bodies gutted blue.

The other frozen eyes that populate the night
Are waiting for their lashes to unthaw
Like snow-iced eaves of roofs; then ripen soft

As berries in the summer of the year --
Multitudes of eyes, green, deep red and black,
Some small, some human, some wide as the entire
night.

Softer than roses, roses some of them,
The beauty of vaginas is more lovely
Than the loveliest flowers, than the bluest skies,
Than music, perfect of comparisons --

The bodied, the disembodied, and yet both --
As perfect, as intangible in their own way,
No interruptions can disturb their life,
Existing in their own realm, quite apart,

Alive as water is, clinging without gap
Or any interruption, each moment
Leading with no effort to another,

Different yet the same, a rising stretch
Of valleys and of hills, gradually more steep, until
The civil is quite left behind, and something graver
touched upon.

Loosing your laughter to the sunburnt wave,
I followed the blond the hayricks of the moon
That lead me through the purple countryside
Etched with huge stars, the broken boughs of light.

They let us ride a long time in the back.
Where was the driver? where was anyone?
The girl who lay beside me was all soft
And golden in the moon, and warm;

Then gradually she got so hot the hay
Was starting to burn brown and black, much like
A cigarette, but there was no flame.

Her eyes were green as grass, her teeth
Were brown as dried corn cobs. I had to get away,
But she wrapped me in her long arms as I slept.

When I close my eyes I see my dreams
Of black space and of deeper night
Full of the tall trees standing round my bed.
Their leaves are showered down on me

As I look up through the charred branches
Like squid tentacles, lesions up and down,
And then a white frost coats the tree with webs
And I am taken into its black arms.

Although I am absorbed by the wood grain,
It feels warm inside. I see green particles like stars
And dim blood vessels branching through the
wood's

Increasingly soft and porous living mesh.
And then there were green eyes that opened, closed,
Then opened even wider once again, and closed.

A moment works in enigmatic ways,
Gone as soon as there, the lighted room
Holding the door between us open just
And then just closing it in an instant more.

A look is not enough, the body must be there
And yet it is in only the most nebulous way,
A structure that you half remark within,
Around yourself, a moving thing --

And yet what is motions? Here, and there,
Moments intervene and yet do not convey,
Only I convey – my hand, my arm, my leg –

But what is that – convey? Gathering
A dual momentum in itself, half to change,
The other half to stay, the body peripherally, dimly gathers
mind.

Mother was not all so bad, when I
Came home from training at the Y
She 'd have the stove crowded with simmering
pots,
Brown roast turkey was ready in the oven, glazed

With olive oil, and peas and rice were steam-cooked
On the stove. What did I appreciate? Nothing.
I thought it all was owed to me by right.
Later I found out all quite differently.

And yet mother was by no means a saint;
At twelve she slashed me with a wire hanger
Across the calves; I was wearing short pants --

It all was quite amusing in a way;
She chased me round the whole front of the car,
Cornered me, then lashed me half-a-dozen times.

Ma started poor but then at last got rich,
She seemed to think this was her due, it was
America after all, land of the free,
If you weren't making it, you weren't doing it.

Now why wasn't it happening for you?
You must be lazy, or on booze or drugs,
Or maybe you just fuck too much all day.
The Lord rewards the virtuous in time.

Ma was not a sympathetic type,
In this she was the typical USer,
Someone got a problem, it's their fault,

Don't bother me with their shit, I got mine;
They say that a fire will destroy the world,
A fire set by man, the heart of man.

My mother was just nuts about Christmas.
Thanksgiving did it for her too, but not
Like Christmas and its eve when Santa Claus
Would, at some secretly appointed time,

Come down the chimney, right into the
furnace.
And how his reindeer would have jammed
themselves
Down through the narrow chimney of our
house
I really had no notion. But it's faith.

It's faith that keeps the world spinning around,
And keeps the golden krugerands in flight
Stuffed into Santa's brown bag that at times

Does double duty to dispense with all
The small and startlingly thin and short
Brown people of the world. Just like stay cats.

Christmas was the time that mother loved the most,
Wrapping up presents for us by the ton --
Blue, gold, and green and red and candy-striped;
I always shook the ones that might have toys.

Grandmother in the kitchen made cookies,
It seemed a hundred kinds set out on sheets.
And then the Christmas tree, natural of course,

Smelling of outdoors and of sticky pine --
Each year a different color. "Do you want a gold
tree
This year kids? How about a blue? we haven't had
that kind for a while."

My mother loved to decorate the Christmas tree.
She made a whole big ritual of it; Christmas music,
The Nutcracker, of course, maybe a drink of two for her
To get into the mood a little more,

And after I was old enough maybe one for me.
My favorite was always Tom and Jerry's,
Which my father duly made; but for the best
You had to go down to the Crystal restaurant

Where Joe and Leo -- Joe tall, thin, hooked nosed --
Italian looking, although he was Greek, and Leo
His brother, short and bald, and looking like a German
monk

Although he too was Greek of course -- and well
They had the best in town. Sometimes my father
Let me take it with some booze, a little, once or twice.

Once when I was five I stole money from the Church.
This was how it happened. In those days
You had an envelope you sealed your quarter in.
Well, I don't know what got into me -- I took mine out.

I bought so much candy at the corner store
The son who worked the place was losing his patience:
"Come on, come on, I don't have all day." "Okay I'll have
Some gum drops and a watermelon slice
and...and...and...."

And so I gluttonized the whole white bag-full
On the side porch steps; I don't know how they found me
out.
They seldom went either in or out that way.

But then, as it happened, it was time for my bath that night:
My mother was absolutely furious. It was only a quarter,
but still...
"That was God's money," she screamed at me, and hit me
hard with the back of her hair brush.

Mother hated Jews, or if not hate
She didn't trust them further than a needle's point.
You heard it in her voice from time to time
Whenever she had cause to mention them.

Blacks weren't too much higher on her list,
But it was my grandmother who really feared them most.
And fear was what it was; their mocha skin
To her was just the height of contra naturam.

She used to say 'Don't look at them too long'
Sometimes when we found ourselves in Syracuse.
My mother went one better, "Don't look at all."

For myself, half my heroes were Black guys: Hendrix,
The raised fists of the Panthers at the Mexico Olympic
games,
And most of all Ali, Ali, Ali. I write his name three times, a
mortal god.

You cannot see past the glass of time
With all its piled and half-melted ice.
The bourbon of the world will eat it through,
The alcohol of the world eat you as well.

Me, I prefer benzodiazepines,
Xanax and valium and all that stuff --
No hangover with them, just make you sleep,
But sleep is what I need -- insomnia:

Anxiety is like a cancer growing inside of you,
Leukemia let's say, the symptoms for
A long time barely there, and then one day they are.

And that's your day. And everybody has one,
It is written in the book that Mohammed wrote,
Among the Buddhists, in the Bible. Yet are you merely
dust?

Some people always have a quite hard time,
They don't fit in and everybody knows,
Especially their teachers and parents
(Hard to say which are their worst enemies.)

These days of course, there are lots of drugs.
I wanted once to fuck a school teacher,
A special ed. instructor – the retard class –
Called herself “an educator” of course.

So one day she was telling me she'd had
A really really bad one: these two boys –
They're almost always boys. (I wonder why.)

Had clearly been without their meds, their dope,
Ritalin it mostly is, I think, an upper,
But with a paradoxical effect – it slows them down, until
they're nice and calm.

The scent of your body is more a kind of warmth,
And if it is a scent it's like a fruit
Warmed on a windowsill in the summer sun
Still carrying the smell of soil or of vines and leaves,

Still carrying the freshness of the air itself
Saturated with the warmth of the hot sun,
A sun so different from the half-shaded sill,
Filled with a power, even with a threat.

Yet what could your body be if not a threat?
Graceful in movement, and yet watchful too.
Watchful in every part and every limb,

Filled with the power of a gaze, a sun itself,
A gaze with its own luminous dark touch
That tenderly traces, traces, yet can't leave things whole.

The yellow half moon slides into your smile
And watermelon seeds are in your teeth.
You spit them out but green vines with zucchini
Grow in their place. Your breasts are two peaches.

Not that big but round and soft and warm
And juicy firm, flowing with honey, sugar, spice,
And every breath you take is like a menthol
Cigarette, fragrant, poisonous and warm.

Not poisonous totally but not really safe --
How dangerous your touches are to me,
Even the slightest ones; a mere soft slide

Along my forearm gives me all tingles.
It's women that should have these things, not men,
Yet I'm a man. And you, just what are you?

The book that flutters through the pages of the sun
Reaches its tendrils through the bluest space,
Loading gold filaments of heat and light
With yellow flowers, with red grapes and plums.

The apple that seduced Eve banished here,
The hanging gardens of the thunderheads
Drop seeds of burning rain into the lake
That shines like silver through the summer night.

The steps that aim the sun across the sky
Left hieroglyphic markings on the daylight moon
And empty sockets where five eyes had been.

Yet crumble the moon into my waiting palms,
My sun will burn as bright as any day
In winter when the white wheat combs the wind.

What marks the soil before the root of day,
And then what brings the salamander up
Into the fire of the arcing sun? --
The power of all light beyond the light.

The depth of day must have its root in earth,
But what can be the earth? Hairless bipeds,
Not predators exactly but worse, fools,
Have taken clitoris and testicle to bank.

The hairless dog will run through the wide hills,
Barking its torment to the greening wind
And not a single veterinary quack

And not a single human one will help.
White houses made of wood, set far apart,
Mimic the main white house that floats above.

When I am dead, then there'll be nothing left,
Not my body, though it had a good start --
But it got derailed. Injuries.
So then that leaves my writing. What a laugh.

Emily Dickinson's one sister in-law
Discovered all her poetry, all nice and neat,
Preserved it, understood it, saw what it was,
And tried to get it published, and then did.

But what was that blue fly saying when she died?
You live a pointless life. It's over now.
No one will see this shit. Your letter to the world.

Unless the world changes hugely, it's not interested.
But the world did change, and then more and more.
But what can change it now, is there anything?

Print every Sutra on a gain of rice,
Make every Bible of a bamboo tree.
The clouds move spectrally across the sky,
As though from west to east or east to west.

The sun is still amid the sky; the earth has stopped,
The numbers racing on are now faces
That have the eyes, the noses, the cheekbones
Of each other; like shadows in a room.

And then the dreams of napalm came to me,
Dreams of white phosphorous. And needle
Fragmentation ordinance that the Israelis use.

Sun of the tiger fur of fields striped with gold,
And wine dark red, we will be there one day,
With golden daffodils floating here and there.

The angels of the lord move up and down
The gold and turning ladder of the sun;
Life is the diamond ring, or maybe jade,
But death is the coveted and black onyx prize.

Death is the panther in the dark room
That you cannot see; death is the powder,
Purest white, you contemplate, it's the loss
Of everything you have achieved, the thought

Of everything you failed to achieve, the dream
Of everything you wanted but could not,
The mirror showing you the wrinkled skin,

The photograph showing you drought-spidered earth,
Death, of your desire to go there and to do;
Death your final indolence, your lack of home.

The fire in your hair is just a trick
Of smoke and mirrors, mostly smoke;
The edges of the sun that burn along your eyes
Make the fire of your hair that much more bright.

Perhaps you cannot feel it; but you know.
You have been on fire all your life.
Your life has been a thing that you've consumed,
It has shown you the way to immolation.

Beauty of suicide, our principle. We'll dive
Into the deep pool both at once, together
And alone, as it must be; but even if alone,

Still not desperate, committing an act of
Purity and self-commitment, beyond what
Anyone can think or say, purest integrity.

The roses on the garage's espalier
Are yellow roses, always my favorite;
Now I say farewell to things that do not fare,
Whether well or ill. They are the things of earth.

They have no mind that we know of, no destiny;
Fate must come from deep presentiment
And this from deep within self-sensing mind.
Unless the roses in their swirled darkness

Can delicately sense themselves somehow.
They always have been the strangest of all flowers.
Ply upon ply of darkness, silken, obscure,

An image of what some of us must be,
Even if privately, and therefore all,
Except that some must do it instantly.

Green berries burgeon in the hill's blue heart
Beneath a sky where burning white clouds drift,
Invisible cicadas' tuning fork
Of heat, the world so still, radiant and calm;

The visible insignia of light
Spark on green domes crumbling, awash;
Rising heat shimmer in the bright field's midst --
Resonating tines, small voices sing.

A yellow filter set across the world,
Sun blaze is steeping time in fragrances;
Walking I am there, and I am here,

My step uncertain in the stiff current
Of grasses tangled, dry, woven, breaking
All around me as I drag them forward.

The clarity of space this afternoon
As all of sunlight fills the summer's world --
Warm smell of light on dusty bricks
From the old chimney dumped in a ditch of vines.

Four of us play at killing horse flies.
Board slats painted across a red brown mare --
Beyond a ways there is a dark stable,
Above the stable, steep sky pounds with heat.

A sky of fathomless light blue above,
A white rim of mid-day down near the hill --
And the sun burns right into our necks

As we take the blue flies and the green flies
That are like pieces, chips of bright metal,
Smashing these fragments of sun between two bricks.

Father took me to the boat house once,
We spent the evening fixing the engine.
Fumes from it made a white heavy fog
That settled just above the water line.

We moved about in a toxic sun mist,
The engine like a hot stove between us,
Covering our faces with our shirts --
I passed tools to a voice without a face.

Crouching underneath the smog we put
Sharp questions tapped out on metal pipes
To fellow prisoners -- wheels, gears and belts,

Then father sent me out to get fresh air,
And I wondered how long he'd stay in there,
Trapped in poisonous fumes and machinery.

The rain is needles in the black-sheathed night
That's broken into stars like a piranha's jaws;
The endless throat and tunnel of space-time
Is poised to swallow the green fate of earth.

The man upon a ledge looks up, not down;
He looks into the blackness where the streaks
Of star-seeds blossom into red, and where
He will be going if he has the balls.

Darkest celestial night, deep cave of fate,
Unknown, unknowable diverticula
Leading the whole way. Or are they following?

And you the draughtsman of your scoop of light
In which you neither lead, nor which you follow,
The melting light that is your unknown life.

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place at one time for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had various occasions to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any language which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliche?

Yes or not even a cliche but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell

students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much

it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2009 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.

